Destiny of a Princess

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Summary: AU. Jenna's a princess who longs for freedom from her prison. But will this freedom come at a price? Chapter four up, finally, reviews very much appreciated.

Chapter 1: Prologue

The inspiration fairy (or rather, arrogant muse) has hit me, and resulted in this. Most of this has been pre-written, and so it won't have such long delays between chapters. I'll warn you now, it's AU, but set on Weyard. Enjoy. And review.

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"Once upon a time there was a handsome prince. He had travelled through lands no other man would dare to cross, and had seen more at age seventeen than any man twice his age had seen. The prince was due to become king at eighteen, but had wanted to see the world before he took up his position on the throne. And so he left the palace to explore in his final year of freedom."

"You forgot to say about the ice, mummy."

"Yes, quite right. The prince was to take over the throne of Imil, the City of Ice. The special thing about the City of Ice was that everybody there could use ice, and also water. The children loved it, because it snowed all year. And when anybody was thirsty, the people would always be on hand with some water."

"And then one day he walked into a strange town..."

The lady reciting the story laughed softly. "Do you wish to continue the story?"

"No, mummy, I like it when you say it, because you always remember bits I forget." Her daughter smiled up at her through dark eyes.

"One day, the prince was in need of rest, and he sought a bed in a city called Vale. This place also housed people who could use special powers, but there was something different about this particular town."

"The people could use two powers!"

"That is right. It was known as the City of Two, as the residents could control both earth *and* fire. Both elements had an affinity with each other, and so the city prospered and bloomed. The residents certainly weren't used to visitors. That is why they were so surprised when the Prince of Imil himself walked through the gate. Vale had forged an alliance with Imil many, many years ago, but Imilians rarely visited Vale. Thankfully for the prince, the Valeans were friendly people, and they granted him a room and some food."

"And then he met the princess!"

The woman laughed softly again. Her daughter knew this story very well, as she had told the young one the tale over and over again. "She wasn't a princess at the time, but yes, the prince met a girl. This girl caught his attention, and the prince stayed in Vale for a few more days to try to court her. Being a prince, he was used to getting his own way. The princess fell for his charms, and within a week, he had convinced her to return to Imil with him."

The young girl sitting next to her mother on the end of the bed smiled mischievously. "But the princess had a secret!"

Her mother smiled down at her. "She certainly did. What the prince didn't know, and what the girl was determined not to let him know, was that she could control fire. That was a rare thing, even in Vale, and everybody in the land knew that fire and water should never be mixed. The girl however was in

love with the prince, and so she kept her power to herself, hoping that the prince would never find out. The two returned to Imil, where the prince's mother accepted her new daughter and future princess with open arms. This posed another reason for keeping her power secret – if Imil ever found she was the kin of fire, the girl would be exiled, and possibly killed if found."

"She was a brave girl," commented the young girl, looking up at her mother in awe. "I hope I'm like her someday."

Hopefully you'll never have to be... thought her mother anxiously. She pushed all negative thoughts to the back of her mind, and smiled at her daughter.

"The prince married the girl in a beautiful ceremony. Half of the kingdom watched the royal wedding in awe, and the girl was officially accepted as the princess of the City of Ice. Very soon after, the prince turned eighteen, and was crowned in a glorious ceremony. Imil celebrated the crowning of a just and fair king, and the princess, once a plain, ordinary girl, became queen."

The child's eyes gleamed with excitement as she eagerly looked to her mother for the next part of the story. Outside, the weather had taken a turn for the worse, and the frequent lightning bolts illuminated the pair as they sat on the bed.

"Not long after they had wed, the queen bore a child – the new princess of the City of Ice. She took after her mother in looks, and her father in strength. Everything was perfect for the royal family, and Imil prospered beyond expectance."

"It should end there," piped the girl. Her face was lit in the light of the storm for a brief moment, and her dark eyes looked eerily like her father's piercing blue ones. Her mother, who bore the same dark eyes and reddish hair,

nodded in silent agreement. "I always like happy endings." She was an insightful child, thought the mother.

"All was not well, however," continued the woman. "When the princess had just turned three, something unexpected happened. It was known that the princess looked very much like the queen, but it was thought that the princess carried the same elemental power as her father. The couple was proven wrong, however, when the child accidentally set fire to one of the many curtains lining the castle windows." The woman's eyes darkened, though she hid them from her daughter's view. "The queen was heartbroken – her daughter carried the same element as she. The queen knew that if the king found out, he would exile the pair."

"And he did," the girl said in a sad tone. She felt sorry for the princess, even if it was just a story.

"He did indeed. Unbeknownst to the queen, one of the members of the guard had seen the incident, and had reported it to the king. The king stormed through the castle, and when he found his wife and daughter, he ordered the guards to lock them in the western tower." Her tone took on a bitter edge. "He couldn't risk exiling them – if Imil found out what his queen and princess were, they would banish him and appoint the next member in line to the throne. But he couldn't stay in contact with his family. Those guards that felt sorry for the queen and princess couldn't help, as they would be executed."

The girl was unusually silent. Her mother couldn't help smiling – every time she told her daughter the story, the girl would become emotionally involved. But then after the story she would bounce back to her usual self.

"Tell me how it ends, mummy."

"The queen decided one night that she would take the princess and escape. They would escape to the queen's hometown of Vale, and live life in freedom. The queen couldn't bear to see her daughter denied of any happiness, and so she plotted her escape. On one particularly dismal night, she packed some bare essentials, and woke her daughter. By now, the princess was nearing ten years of age, and was beginning to understand her circumstances. The two were careful to make sure the large northern window was sturdy enough for their weight, and they climbed down the tower. They quietly made their escape, travelling for days and nights on end. Whether the king found that his family was missing was never known, for the queen and princess made it safely to Vale."

"Good." The girl smiled.

"Yes. The queen located her family, and they welcomed her back with loving arms. They were delighted to discover they had a granddaughter, and they welcomed the two into their home. They lived for many, many years, and their family grew. Most importantly, the two had finally found freedom."

"Happy ending," the girl grinned at her mother, who smiled back.

"Yes, indeed," her mother agreed. "And I must say, that is the hundredth time I have told you that story. Why do you enjoy it so?"

"Because it's so much like our family," she responded innocently. The woman's heart lurched – it wasn't a lie.

The child's stomach suddenly gave a huge growl, and she burst into a fit of giggles. "I'm hungry! Can we eat something now, please?" She jumped from the bed she had been sitting on with her mother, and her foot connected

with something hard. Curious, she looked to find she'd almost landed on a suitcase. The girl looked to her mother with questioning eyes. The woman chewed her lip for a second, delaying, before deciding she couldn't wait any longer.

"Jasmine," she said, keeling down and taking the child by the shoulders.

"*Jenna*," the girl stressed. "My name is Jenna. Jasmine's too long."

"Listen to me," the woman's tone became urgent. Jenna's eyes widened. "How would you like to...re-enact the story?" Jenna merely blinked at her mother, not understanding. Her mother smiled ruefully. "You aren't happy here, are you? The palace is no home to you, am I correct?"

Jenna fidgeted uncomfortably, unable to meet her mother's eyes. "Well...it's more like a prison than anything else..."

"I feel the same way," her mother said, and Jenna looked at her in shock. Her mother smiled reassuringly. "We should take a leaf from the queen of the City of Ice's book." She was speaking very quickly now. "Let us leave. Escape. This is no home to us. I have distant relatives in other parts of the world...how would you like to meet them?"

"You *do*?" Jenna looked at her mother in awe. "Outside the palace? Can I meet them?"

"Certainly, yes," and her mother smiled more openly. She was anxious, but glad that her daughter wanted to leave as much as she did.

"When?"

"...Tonight. I've packed some belongings, we should have enough with us to travel to my relatives' city."

"*Wow*!" Jenna's eyes lit in excitement.

"Unfortunately we are unable to take the window route, as the queen in the story did. However, mercifully, the doors to the rest of the palace are currently unlocked. Let us leave," and Jenna saw a mixture of frightened horror and excitement in her eyes. Jenna nodded, equally as excited. Her mother picked up the suitcase, and the two slowly made their way out of the tower.

The rain was very heavy by this point, and frequent thunderclaps pierced the deafening silence between mother and daughter. Neither dared to speak to the other. They took hurried footsteps, but were careful not to make a noise. The doors may have been unlocked, but the guards were still on duty, and the pair had to duck into the shadows every now and then to avoid being seen. The two reached the main palace – the largest obstacle. Jenna's father lived here, and if he caught the two trying to escape, he would probably kill them.

"The exit isn't far," said Jenna's mother, explaining, as Jenna hadn't seen enough of the palace to know where the exits were. "We shall go through the kitchen – it is late and we're less likely to be seen." Jenna nodded, her heart pounding in fright. They were so close now, but one wrong move would alert the whole palace to their presence. The pair carefully made their way through the corridors, and then down to the colder stone corridors, where the kitchens were situated. Jenna held her breath as they neared the kitchen door.

Before they could go through to the kitchen, however, they heard a loud bang upstairs, and a commotion started. Yells

and cries could be heard, and Jenna's heart doubled its beat. Her mother looked to the ceiling in shock, her eyes wide with panic. "Quickly, we must hide!" She pulled her daughter back along the corridor, and located an alcove with a heavy curtain fixed over the entrance. Jenna and her mother quickly ducked behind the curtain, and yanked the material over so it hid them from view.

The commotion seemed to move on, but in different directions, so it sounded as though the whole palace was involved. Jenna's mother held her daughter, and stared at the ceiling, wide-eyed with anxiety. The noise upstairs was dotted with thunderclaps from the raging storm outside, and Jenna hid her face in her mother's skirts, frightened.

It wasn't long before the noise died down. Jenna's mother tentatively stood, gently pushing her daughter behind her, and peeked out of the curtain. A deathly silence greeted her, though she knew something was still wrong. "We must leave, right now," and with that she grasped Jenna's hand and began a hurried walk to the kitchen door. Across the corridor, footsteps could be heard running down the small spiral staircase that led to the corridor. Jenna's mother broke into a run, Jenna following, but they couldn't reach the kitchen door in time before somebody reached the corridor.

"Your Highness!" A young man of seventeen or eighteen stared at the two, relief etched across his face. He had long blue hair, and wore the uniform of the castle's researchers. "Princess!"

"Alex!" Jenna grinned in relief. Alex could be trusted – he was one of the studious researchers in the palace, who was teaching Jenna about the world. Her mother often had business in other parts of the tower, and so Jenna stayed with Alex for the majority of her days after her lessons. He

was like a brother to her, and so she knew that he wouldn't run to the king with knowledge of their whereabouts. Alex had always seemed to silently understand the situation from the princess's point of view.

"Alex, you mustn't-" the queen began, but he interrupted her with wide, half-panicked eyes.

"You must return to the tower, your Highnesses! It's safer there; if you stay here you could-"

"Hold," Jenna's mother commanded. "Does the king know of my plans?"

"Plans?" Alex repeated, blinking. "Oh! That is why you're out of the tower!" He looked from the queen to Jenna, understanding in a heartbeat. "No, the palace is under attack!"

"Attack?" The queen's face paled. If the palace were indeed under attack, escaping would prove far too dangerous.

"Yes, your Majesty. The Mars Clan have invaded, and they're attacking everybody in sight. It isn't safe here, please, you must return to the tower!"

"I..." Jenna's mother faltered. The attack would mean a definite increase in security – making the palace almost like a fort. Escape would be impossible. "No. Alex, take Jasmine and hide. I shall secure an escape route, and a hiding space, should we need one."

"But...your Highness!"

"Mummy!" Jenna grasped onto her mother's arm, terrified. The queen knelt so she was eye level with her daughter.

"I shall return, I promise," she said softly. "But it is too dangerous for you to stay with me, for now. Go with Alex, he shall look after you until I come back."

"But-"

"Alex," the queen stood at her full height again, and addressed the young scholar. "Whatever happens, protect my daughter. If anything happens to her..." she couldn't finish her sentence. Instead, she gave a small smile to reassure the two, gently prised Jenna's hand from her own, and turned back to walk down the corridor leading to the main palace.

Jenna watched her mother disappear up another staircase, and fought hard to keep her tears and sobs inside. Alex took her hand and gently beckoned her to follow him. They quickly made their way up the spiral staircase Alex had come down, and found the corridor above to be empty, to their relief.

"We can hide in the library. There's a secret entrance through one of the bookcases that leads to the dormitories; we can sit in there until the commotion dies down." Alex explained as the two walked quickly. Jenna wasn't really paying attention; her feet seemed to follow automatically as she thought longingly of her mother.

They finally reached the library. Alex made sure to lock the door, and then, with a half smile to try to lighten the atmosphere, led Jenna over to a bookcase. "You have never seen this library, correct?" Jenna shook her head, and watched as Alex tapped a combination of coloured book spines. She watched in amazement as the bookcase gave way to a large stone corridor, lit with bracketed torches along the walls. "I'm afraid my room isn't as nice as yours,"

said Alex, to which Jenna scoffed – her room felt more like a prison, "but it's comfortable enough."

Sure enough, the corridor branched into a series of rooms. Alex's appeared to be the smallest, though it was easily the most comfortable. Jenna noticed that there was a stack of books from the library stacked in a neat pile on the floor. As Alex made sure the entrance was concealed, she read a couple of the spines, and found the subjects concerned the royal family. Alex breathed a large sigh of relief, which distracted the young princess.

"You're worried too, aren't you?" she asked of the young man. He smiled knowingly.

"You're a perceptive one, Princess. I've never been much of a fighter, except in the field of knowledge. And I hardly think those clan brutes..." he stopped himself for Jenna's sake.

From inside the dormitory, the noises were muffled and distant, and Jenna began to calm slightly. She perched on the end of Alex's bed and wriggled her toes in front of his small fire. Alex sat himself on the bed, and stared at the ceiling, wondering whether the commotion would ever die.

There was a silence while each contemplated their own thoughts. And then:

"If I may ask, your Highness, where exactly were you going?"

Jenna looked around in alarm, but Alex's eyes weren't reprimanding, on the contrary, they were sparkling with amusement. She laughed nervously.

"My mother was...showing me the palace," she wasn't quite sure why she was lying to her trusted friend, but she felt she couldn't tell the truth. Much as she loved Alex, she was

frightened of her father's reaction if he ever found out that the two were escaping. "I only remember the tower, and I wondered what the rest looked like."

"Ah." He knew it was a lie, but didn't chase the matter.

Something large and heavy suddenly toppled close by, causing a loud bang. Alex jumped up in alarm, and the sudden reaction startled Jenna. She leapt off the bed and attempted to follow him, but he shook his head. "It is safer here, Princess."

Jenna frowned. "Why does everybody say that? I'm old enough to see for myself!"

Despite himself, Alex smiled. "I shall check and return, and when I do, you can follow me all you like."

Jenna nodded eagerly. Alex smiled again, and slipped out of the room down toward the library. His first thought was that the door to the library had been forced open, but it was still locked. The room was empty. Frowning, Alex surveyed the scene more carefully. He didn't know why, but the room felt...odd. Deciding it was no longer safe to stay in the area, he started walking back down the corridor to where the princess was waiting.

"Feel up to an adventure, your Highness?" Alex asked when he reached his room. Jenna grinned and took his hand. The two made their way back through the library, Alex constantly checking for intruders, and found their way back into the main palace. Jenna tensed, and her heart started racing from excitement and horror again.

They hadn't covered much area before they rounded a corner to find a couple of the intruders looming at the end of another corridor, apparently speaking to somebody. Alex

and Jenna quickly hid in a nearby alcove, hoping that they hadn't been seen. When it was clear that they hadn't been detected, Alex carefully peeked around the heavy curtain. He pulled his head back inside, and knelt to the princess's eye level.

"Wait here," he mouthed. Jenna couldn't make much silent protest before he had quietly ducked around the curtain. Alex flattened himself against the wall, and very carefully edged along it, nearing the corridor containing the two intruders.

They were *huge*. Alex was tall by human standards, but these foreigners loomed at least a foot above his height. It was obvious from first glance that they weren't human – scales lined their skin, and these weren't peachy in colour. One of them was made of blue scales, and the other green. Alex frowned and inched closer in order to listen in to their conversation. His eyes widened when he realised who they were speaking to – it was the queen. Though she was a great deal shorter than the pair, she held her ground, and appeared to be speaking authoritatively.

"You shall not pass," Alex could finally make out her voice.

"I disagree, *your Highness*," sneered the green one. The blue one held up his hand, and started to speak.

"What defences have you? I doubt your husband would come running to your aid, especially now that he knows what you are."

"You will show some respect!" the queen snapped, glaring at the intruder.

"Did you at least tell him yourself? Or did you leave it to somebody else, *traitor*?"

"Enough!" The queen's eyes flashed dangerously. "You have no right to be here. These are *not* your lands, and therefore you haven't the right to accuse!"

"These may not be our lands," the green one continued, "but this concerns our very blood, which is far more important than feeble villagers!"

"I do not share your blood," said the queen quietly. "We may both be of Mars origin, but my blood differs greatly from yours. Mainly because my people aren't cold blooded killers."

She had touched a nerve. Alex could only watch in horror at what happened next. The blue one drew his sword, and quick as a flash, plunged it into the queen's chest. Amazingly, she managed to keep her steely, angered gaze, even as she collapsed onto the ground. And then her life left her. Alex closed his eyes in horror, and he leant against the wall, breathing more deeply than usual.

"It is done. Find the girl, she carries the same blood." The blue one sheathed his sword without bothering to wipe the blood from its surface. It was then that the two saw Alex, who realised it immediately. He opened his eyes slowly, and steeled himself. The Mars Clan members drew their weapons and headed straight for him.

They didn't get much further. Using all his strength and effort, Alex created a large, thick ice barrier. It stretched across the width of the corridor, effectively blocking their path to him. Angered, the green one sent a powerful jet of flames into the barrier, but it didn't give. The blue one held up his palm, and the green one stopped exhausting his energy.

"We have no business with you," said the blue one coldly.

"You leave, now," Alex said icily. "Or I shall create barriers like these throughout the entire palace. You would die a cold, drawn out death. And I am not easily depleted of energy."

The blue one stared at Alex through his crimson eyes. Something changed, and he beckoned to the green one. The green one glared at Alex, before the two changed direction and marched down the corridor toward the exit. "We leave!" the blue one commanded; his voice echoing through the palace.

Alex cut off his energy from the barrier, and it melted into a puddle on the floor. He slumped against the wall, exhausted both physically and mentally. His queen lay on the floor, eyes open, but mercifully there was little blood. Alex closed his eyes, and rubbed at his temples, not having the slightest clue of what to say to the young princess wondering where her mother was. He didn't have to explain, though, as Jenna turned the corner. Her relief at finding Alex was replaced by horror as she saw her mother's lifeless body lying on the cold floor. Her scream would go on to haunt Alex for years to come.

Chapter one done and dusted! Reviews are greatly appreciated!

Chapter 2: Mind Made Up

Chapter two! Things are going to get interesting...thank you muchly to my amazing reviewers, Meneil, Serirod and Maxus!

Disclaimer: I don't own Golden Sun! If I did, I'd be rich!

Eight years later...

"...And so, land was created using the basic principals of the four elements of the world. Princess? Princess!" The old man slammed his book closed, snapping the princess out of her trance. She blinked rapidly, and looked up at Kraden sheepishly.

"Sorry, Kraden. You were saying?"

"Ah, well, no matter," said Kraden, slightly exasperatedly. He took off his glasses and used his cloak to wipe them clean. "I can see your mind is elsewhere, Princess. We shall end lessons for today."

Jenna perked up immediately. "Thank you, Kraden!" she beamed at him, earning a disapproving mutter from the old scholar.

"I don't know, you young folk are so disinterested these days. Well, don't blame me if you try to travel to Hesperia and end up in Alhafra." Jenna giggled, knowing the scholar didn't mean it. Kraden was so easy to work up, and Jenna had needed the distraction from work. Her mind refused to focus today, and she was glad that Kraden had ended her lesson early. "I can see you won't be studying for the rest of

the evening," said Kraden, his wise blue eyes twinkling. "What have you planned, dare I ask, Princess?"

"Hmm," Jenna cocked her head in mock seriousness. "First I thought I'd break out of the palace using the latest technology. Then I thought I'd travel to every city on Weyard, and convert them all to my cause. Finally, I'd take over the world and rule as its unquestioned Queen."

Kraden chuckled. "Just make sure you eat some dinner before you attempt that."

"Did somebody mention dinner?" Alex opened the door to the classroom and grinned at the two. "I was getting a little hungry, if truth be told."

"Ah, Alex," Jenna beamed at him. "You've just proven a theory of mine that I've formulated – see, I *have* been studying, Kraden – all men think about is their stomachs."

"Stomachs and looks," muttered Kraden, glancing at Alex. He had reason – Alex hadn't appeared to age a day in the last eight years, and had only grown more good looking. He was the object of the servant girls' affections, and many argued over shifts cleaning the library in the hope of getting to stare at him for a solid hour.

"Kraden, you misguided fool. I'm afraid I can't see what you're referring to," Jenna grinned, "though if you're talking about the insane amount of time Alex spends getting ready in the morning, then I fully understand where you're coming from."

"Says the princess who took three whole days to decide what to wear on her birthday last year," Alex's eyes sparkled, and he ducked to avoid a pillow from hitting him.

"Ah, young love," Kraden muttered to himself. Jenna spluttered and Alex's eyes widened into saucers. Smiling mischievously, Kraden walked to the classroom's entrance. "I am going to use my time for a more profitable outcome. Alex, the book you wanted is waiting in the library for you." With that, he left.

"Silly old fossil," muttered Jenna, whose face colour had darkened to a deep pink.

"Lessons aren't exactly going well, then?" Alex asked, closing the door behind him and joining the princess on the large sofa she was sat on.

"He keeps mixing up Vault's location with Vale's," Jenna chuckled. "The only time I learn anything accurate is when he speaks of Alchemy."

"If I didn't know any better, I'd say Kraden was plotting to take over the world," said Alex, earning another thrown pillow in his direction. "Your aim's getting a bit sloppy," he commented. Jenna laughed and lounged against the sofa.

"Ugh, why can't you just teach me again? At least you know that rain isn't developed from small pixies carrying water jars," Jenna sighed.

Alex laughed and stared up at the ceiling. "I would, dear Princess, if only I could. Your father is keeping me exceptionally busy these days."

Jenna's eyes darkened, and her mood shifted in a heartbeat. Alex knew he had said the wrong thing, and attempted to change the subject, but Jenna had already started a fierce tirade.

"I swear he made you his advisor just to cut you out from my life," she said angrily.

"Thank you!" Alex said, feigning hurt feelings.

"No...you're a good advisor. The king doesn't deserve you. Selfish, ignorant-"

"Is that the time?" Alex asked hurriedly, standing up.

"Well, it's what he deserves after what he did to my mother and me!" Jenna glared at Alex, who knew he had started something dangerous. Jenna's moods were certainly volatile. "I don't suppose he said *anything* after my mother's death?"

Alex was surprised. Up until this point, Jenna had cautiously avoided mention of her mother. She had tried her best to put the memory of seeing her mother for the last time to the back of her mind. Alex truly didn't know what to say to this question. "Well..."

"I knew it." Jenna stood furiously. "I'm exhausted, Alex. I'm tired for suffering because my father can't accept me for who I am." For Jenna had figured it out – the story her mother had told her all those years ago was her own.

"Princess-"

"Ugh, fine, go to my father, do whatever he wishes, and tell him where he can shove his ideas." Jenna flopped back onto the sofa and closed her eyes tightly. Alex couldn't tell whether she was fighting back tears or not, but he took this as his cue to leave. He did so quietly, leaving Jenna to feel guilty for snapping at him like that.

The princess rubbed at her temples, and let the tears fall freely. She *was* tired, mentally. Jenna had refused to look

back at memories after her mother died, but she couldn't forget what her mother had said. *I have distant relatives in other parts of the world*. Jenna couldn't help wondering, with an aching heart, whether she would ever be able to find these relatives. If she escaped from the palace (which was near impossible with the extra security placed on the palace after the Mars Clan invasion), could she search for them? And perhaps, most importantly, would they accept her?

Jenna had dreamed of escape ever since her mother had almost led them to it eight years ago. In her mind, as she was slipping into blissful sleep, she would subconsciously plot escape routes. She would plan what to pack, and what was suitable to wear for a possible escape. She had even decided that she wouldn't tell a soul, not even Alex. Now that he was the royal advisor she couldn't risk telling him, in case the king found out.

Something snapped in her mind. Jenna sat up and fiercely wipes the tears that lingered on her cheeks. "Why not? Why can't I go? What exactly is stopping me?" she asked out loud. Her mind searched for an answer. It could find nothing. Not even the thought of leaving her friends, whom only consisted of Kraden and Alex anyway, could sway her. "I'm leaving. I'm leaving, right now." Jenna sat, blood pulsing through her temples in excitement, considering her plan once again, and it made perfectly logical sense.

"I'm going," she muttered, hastily gathering some essentials together. Jenna didn't yet know how she was going to cover her tracks, and how she could delay the discovery of her absence, but she knew how she was going to escape. Her mother had mentioned climbing down the tower, and that was exactly what she was going to do. Luckily for her, Jenna was quite agile, and wouldn't find it too difficult. Thankfully, the palace gardens weren't heavily guarded, as the king

hadn't felt the need for his private outdoor estate to be watched all the time. She would slip through the gardens, scale the wall leading to Imil itself, and then quietly leave town. Jenna decided to find Vale, the City of Two, to begin with, knowing that her mother originally hailed from there thanks to the story she used to tell.

Her meagre possessions packed, Jenna chewed her lip. She couldn't leave without saying goodbye to her lifelong friend, but she couldn't face him in person, in case he tried to stop her. Jenna decided on a note – inadequate, yet it would give her the chance to say goodbye. She grabbed a quill and tore off a bit of parchment from her lesson notes, smiling slightly at the look on Kraden's face if he saw her tearing her precious knowledge apart. Jenna scribbled a short note, and was preparing to place it on her dresser, when a knock at the door distracted her.

"...Yes?" she called out cautiously.

"Sorry to disturb your Highness," a voice Jenna didn't recognise floated through the room. The speaker was female, and quite softly spoken. Intrigued despite herself, Jenna scrubbed the remainder of tears from her face, and pocketed the note. She opened the door to find a girl of around sixteen with similar blue hair to Alex's. Her eyes met Jenna's for a brief second when the princess opened the door, but the girl hastily looked to the floor.

"Oh, hello," said Jenna lamely.

"I apologise sincerely for disturbing you, your Highness. I am here to change your bed sheets, ma'am."

"Oh! Sorry, come in," Jenna stepped aside to let the girl in. She walked in carrying a large basket, and lit a couple of lanterns so she could see what she was doing. Jenna

followed curiously. "I've never seen you before, are you new to the palace?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the girl shyly. "Today is my first day, your Highness."

"I see," Jenna commented. *Poor you*. She took this time to study the girl more. Though she was only perhaps a year younger than the princess, she had the shyness of somebody half her age. She was quite small for her age, too, and bore similar looks to Alex. "This is going to sound strange, but you're not related to the scholar Alex, are you?"

The girl smiled truly for the first time since she had entered the room. "Yes, your Highness, I am his sister."

"Ah," and Jenna managed a grin. "Then I think it is my duty to tell you that all the servants are madly in love with him. They will never leave you alone."

The girl smiled openly, her eyes laughing. "They do not yet know that we are related. I hear them speak of him every night, and every night it is the same thing. Though truthfully I cannot see what the fuss is about."

Jenna laughed. "I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name...?"

"Oh! Forgive me, your Highness. My name is Mia."

Jenna let Mia finish changing the bed sheets in silence. She was pondering a new plan – if she left the note in the room, Mia might find it before Alex, and that would probably result in the king being told of her escape. That would be dangerous – if the king found her, she would most likely be executed. Discreetly taking out the note, she folded it into quarters and wrote Alex's name on the top.

"Mia? Could you do something for me?"

"Certainly, your Highness," Mia looked rather surprised at the question.

Slight flaw in plan. If Mia runs into Alex, he'll get the note before I can leave. Jenna chewed her lip, suddenly realising that perhaps a note wasn't a good idea. "Oh...um...no, it doesn't matter."

"Are you certain, your Highness?" Mia asked tentatively.

"Yes," said Jenna, smiling slightly. She tucked the note out of sight into her dress pocket discreetly.

Mia curtseyed and left the room, leaving Jenna to finalise her escape plan. She grabbed the small satchel she'd hastily shoved out of sight containing her belongings, and walked over to the northern window. There were a set of French doors that led to a small balcony overlooking the king's gardens, but they were currently locked. *Soon take care of that*, thought Jenna, dropping her satchel and grasping the handle. *One...Two...*

Before she could wrench at the doors, though, a knock at the door startled her. Jenna quickly hid the satchel from sight again, thinking Mia must have forgotten something, and walked over to the door. She opened it to greet the young girl, but her eyes instead met the figure of a tall brunette man. Before Jenna could even blink, he had grabbed her and shoved a hand over her mouth to stop her from yelling. A slightly younger blonde followed the two as the brunette dragged her back into her room, and he locked the door using a stolen key behind them.

The blonde pocketed the key and grinned at his companion. "Well, that went much better than we'd hoped, huh?" He

turned his attention to the princess, and cocked his head, amused. "You're a pretty one, thank goodness. I was afraid we'd end up kidnapping some ogre."

Jenna frowned and tried to yell something, but what she said was muffled by the brunette's hand. The blonde grinned. "Sorry about this, we're usually a lot more careful with people of great importance," Jenna frowned more deeply – was he mocking her? – "but we're in a bit of a hurry."

She watched as he walked over to the French doors and tugged at them. "Locked," he said softly, "no surprise there then. Man, you should tell them to lay off the security, Princess,"

No shall do, thought Jenna angrily, and she mustered up all the strength she could to elbow the man holding her in the gut. He "oofed" heavily and let go of her in surprise. Jenna took this opportunity to run, but unfortunately her living quarters weren't exactly huge. She ran through to her living room and slammed the door behind her, temporarily stopping the two men from following. She could hear their shouts as they tried to get through the heavy door, so she quickly ran to the considerably smaller window in the hopes of getting through. However, they were too fast, and Jenna had to settle for leaping over the sofa and grabbing a candlelit lamp that sat on the table next to it.

"Stay back!" she yelled, holding the lamp threateningly. The candles had blown out, but the lamp itself was quite sharp. The two men stopped and held up their palms defensively.

"Aah, be careful, Princess, we wouldn't want to have to get violent," the brunette said soberly. The blonde chuckled, angering the young princess.

"What do you *want*?" Jenna shouted, half hoping she would attract some attention. The pair appeared to realise this, as they looked at each other with significant eyes.

"Can't answer that right now," said the brunette shortly. He suddenly walked over to a small table and grabbed a water jug Jenna used for drinking water. It was still quite full.

"What are you going to do, drown me?" Jenna asked scathingly. The blonde laughed openly.

"You have to admit, she's quick," he said, his oceanic eyes sparkling with amusement.

"What do you *want* with me?" Jenna repeated, grasping the lamp more firmly and wondering what on Weyard the brunette was going to do with the water jug.

He didn't respond, not vocally anyway. Instead he gripped the jug, and with all his might, threw it at the ceiling candelabra. It was extinguished, and the room was plunged into darkness. Jenna shrieked in surprise, and immediately bolted for the door. The blonde had predicted this, and carefully blocked it from opening. He made a grab for Jenna, but she was too fast, and she instead seized a chair. She could see the reflection of the window now that her eyes had adjusted to the dark, and so she gripped the chair and swung it at the glass with all her might.

The window shattered, but this had the added effect of telling the men where she was. Jenna managed to hoist one leg over the windowsill, but the brunette had caught up, and managed to pull her away from the window. Jenna responded by biting his hand. Hard. He yelled in pain, and cursed loudly, allowing her to break free again. She could have sworn she heard the blonde laugh again, and as he hurried toward the source of the other man's curses, Jenna

tiptoed around him and bolted for the door. She wrenched it open and ran through to the lit room.

Having sight gave her the advantage, and she ran for the door to the rest of the palace. Unfortunately she'd forgotten that the blonde had locked it, and she wrenched at it unsuccessfully. *The key*! She saw the blonde had dropped it; there was a golden glint lying on the floor. However, she had delayed too long, and as she stooped to pick it up, the two came back into the lit room. Before Jenna could stand, the blonde had grabbed hold of her.

"Well," he panted, and Jenna cursed the amusement in his voice, "that was fun while it lasted."

"Fun?" the other man was standing outside her peripheral vision, and he didn't sound at all amused. "Just get on with it."

The man holding Jenna shifted slightly, and then quickly forced a piece of cloth over her mouth. Jenna recognised the sickly smell immediately – chloroform. She tried to struggle but was in an awkward position and couldn't get a good grip on anything. Her vision started darkening, and her body grew tired.

"Sweet dreams, Princess."

Reviews are nice. Hint.

Chapter 3: City of Two

Chapter three for your reading pleasure. Horrific update speed this time, I apologise. Sorry for the delay, this was supposed to have been up earlier than now. Thanks to Serirod, Meneil, EagleFox and Maxus for reviewing! Enjoy.

Disclaimer: I don't own Golden Sun. How many times...?

That's uncomfortable.

It certainly was. One minute Jenna was floating in a hazy dream, where there were no worries, no antagonists and certainly no cocky blonde boys. And the next-

"Ugh," Jenna commented, feeling a wave of nausea washing over her. *Well, that was an intelligent statement. Way to impress whoever might be wherever you are right now.*

She quickly opened her eyes, and to her blessed relief she was alone. The sudden harsh light caused her eyes to water, but she sat up and took in her surroundings. Wherever she was had a warmer climate than the one she was used to, and hot sunshine blazed in through a nearby window. The room she was in was quite pleasant, holding colourful tapestries depicting different events, none of them violent. The bed she was lying on was big enough, but the blanket reacted with her skin, causing it to itch.

Jenna scratched absent-mindedly on her arm, trying quickly to remember why she was here. Something told her it was bad news. *The room...that blue-haired girl...and then...oh dear.*

Oh dear indeed. Jenna stared at the door with a sense of foreboding, as the handle turned. She shifted slightly to get a better view, causing the blanket to irritate her further. *Mysterious stranger, possibly wielding an axe, sword or other sharp object, almost through the door, and you're worrying about the blanket?* She had to laugh at herself.

The person opening the door must've had heard her dry laugh. He didn't look surprised to see her awake, anyway. To Jenna's annoyance, it was the blonde-haired man who'd invaded her room...how long ago? How long had she been here? He grinned, and set a water jug down on the table.

"Darn, was hoping that you were still asleep. Bit of cold water doesn't do any harm now and then."

She *hated* his casualness. Unconsciously, she drew the blanket up to her shoulders, and waved an accusing finger at him. "Explain," she ordered, glaring at him.

"You don't beat about the bush, do you?" He stretched and leaned on a small dresser at the other end of the room. His eyes twinkled with amusement. "I suppose you're wondering what's going on."

"Hence the word 'explain'," Jenna said through gritted teeth.

"All right," he put his palms up in defence. "Well, there's a perfectly good explanation as to why we brought you here-"

Of course, the tall brunette. Forgot him.

"...it's actually got a lot to do with your old man. You see-"

"My father?!" Jenna asked in disbelief. Something clicked. "He ordered you to kidnap me?"

"What?" The blonde's eyes widened slightly, sensing dangerous territory. "No! No, it was-"

Jenna threw the blanket off and leapt out of bed, grabbing a wooden plank from the floor. She held it threateningly in front of her.

"W-what I mean is, that we were actually on a rescue mission." The blonde quickly tried to calm the situation. It had been difficult enough getting her here in the first place.

"A rescue mission," Jenna stated, an eyebrow arched in suspicion.

"Yeah!" The blonde grinned in relief, which didn't help matters at all.

"Why don't I believe you?" Jenna growled sarcastically.

"All right, how about I get someone who you will believe?"

"Oh? And who would that be? I don't know anybody in this backwards...town, village, city, wherever you brought me!" She could sense his anger – only faint at the moment, but she could tell that her stubbornness was beginning to annoy him.

"Look," he said, forcing a calm voice, "I-"

"I am not interested!" Jenna glared at him. "I do not care for your plans, I don't even want to know what you're planning, and I demand that you take me back to Imil, right now!"

He opened his mouth to speak – or possibly yell by this stage – but was interrupted by a sharp knock on the door.

"Now, what's all the racket about?" A warm, slightly bossy voice spoke before its owner came through the door carrying the largest washing basket Jenna had ever seen. A slightly plump woman with hair of a soft red tone entered, and as she surveyed the room she tutted audibly. "Now really, dear, I know you're a bit confused, but there's no need to threaten my son. He's done nothing but care for you since you came here."

Jenna was completely taken aback, and for a moment was completely silent. What?

The blonde grinned. "Thanks, mum, I was starting to struggle here."

WHAT?

"Wh-what exactly is going on?" Jenna sputtered. "Your son? You knew he was going to kidnap me? And yet you approved?!" Jenna was amazed – the woman had to be middle-aged; surely she wouldn't be so stupid as to approve of something like this?

"There's no need to yell, dear," she said matter-of-factly. "I'm standing only a few feet away. Now, what seems to be the issue?"

Jenna opened her mouth stupidly, astounded by the lack of understanding in these people.

"Well, dear, my son didn't have a choice," the woman stated, beginning her task of making Jenna's bed. "All things considered, it was much safer to take you and bring you here, considering recent events."

"Recent events? What recent events?"

"Your city's massive problem with the world, is what," The blonde boy spoke. When Jenna said nothing, he continued: "you must have noticed the lack of communication to other cities lately, Princess. Our city is practically your city's brother, and yet all the communication we had with them was cut off suddenly. It's like Imil decided to go solo."

"Don't be ridiculous," Jenna spat, "without outside communications, we wouldn't survive. Where do you think our food comes from? Our income?"

"Isaac's right," the woman spoke up, still half-absorbed in her task of changing the bed sheets. "Imil suddenly severed ties with our city. We got a bit worried when other cities reported the same thing. It seems Imil's King doesn't want anybody to know what he's planning."

"Planning?" Jenna let out a dry laugh. "My father may be a bit deranged, but plans?" Even as she said this, Jenna knew something the woman had said rang true. Her father certainly seemed busy these days, calling upon Alex and his trusted advisors more and more often.

"We figured that getting you out early was the best thing to do," the boy – Isaac – spoke up.

"But why?" Jenna's curiosity had taken over, and she lessened her grip on the wooden plank. "Why do you care?"

"We have a lot of friends in Imil," the woman said softly, and for a moment it seemed she had abandoned her bed making. She stared at the duvet. "They're innocents. If something were to happen to them, we'd never forgive ourselves."

"So why not 'rescue' them? Why me?"

"That'd look a bit suspicious," Isaac said wryly. "Moving the whole town out? I think your old man might notice something then."

"Dear, don't refer to his Highness so informally," the woman, chastised Isaac, resuming her task.

"Sorry."

Jenna blinked. "And..."

"The reason we got you is because we think you might be able to help us." Isaac grinned. "What do you say, are you up for it?"

"Help you...? After you kidnapped me?"

"Here we go..."

"Excuse me?!" Jenna glared at him. "You take me away from everything I've ever known, force me here, and then expect me to help you?"

"You were hardly happy at home, were you?" Isaac commented, his eyes firm.

He had hit the mark, but still Jenna fumed at him. "What are you saying, that my father plans to go to war or something?" She laughed humourlessly. "Don't be ridiculous."

Nobody spoke. Jenna's eyes widened. "You can't be serious..."

"Unfortunately, dear, we have reason to believe that our friends in Imil are in danger of being used. We also have reason to believe that our neighbours are in trouble, too. Some are setting up defences already."

Jenna snorted. "What? But that doesn't make any sense. My father rules over Imil, and he's always been happy just to have that under his belt."

"Ever since the Mars Clan invaded, he's apparently been determined to take over and control those who weren't of Mercury blood. Especially those with Mars blood. He believes them to be rotten to the core, and he's convinced himself that if he doesn't act against them, he'll be overrun one day. He's trying to eliminate them, basically."

"That's why we were worried about you, Princess," Isaac appeared to be deadly serious. "You're of Mars origin, so we figured that you'd be in serious danger. Your father was afraid that Imil would find out he bore a child of Mars origin, and so we had to get you out."

"But..." What they were saying actually made sense to Jenna. "How do you know? About me?" She glanced at mother and son suspiciously. "My father was determined to keep my power a secret. How is it you know?"

The woman's warm aura suddenly shifted. "There have been too many questions," she said briskly. She scooped up her washing and made to leave the room.

"One minute!" Jenna exclaimed. "How? How do you know? Answer me!"

"Do not make demands of me!" The woman yelled, and to her alarm Jenna saw the woman's eyes flash dangerously. "You are no longer in Imil, and you certainly have no right to order me around!" There was a pause while both Jenna and the woman absorbed the shock of this outburst. The woman shook her head. "If Mehry could see you're attitude now...she would be disappointed."

Jenna's world stopped.

"How...how do you know my mother's name?"

The woman stopped, and looked with wide eyes at Jenna, realising she had said too much. "I...the news of the crowning...her name was given-"

"Don't lie to me!" Jenna exhaled sharply. "Her crowning name was Anahita...but her real name was Mehry. How...?"

The woman sighed deeply, almost sadly. She couldn't meet Jenna's eyes, though why Jenna didn't know.

"Your mother...I knew her. Before she was whisked away by the beauty of Imil." She forced herself to look at Jenna. "She hailed from this city. The City of Two."

"Vale..." Jenna whispered. She couldn't believe it.

"How ironic, eh? You were going to fight to get here, and you were brought here anyway," Isaac commented, trying to break the thick silence.

"Wh- how do you know I was considering coming here?!" Jenna tore her eyes away from the woman and glared suspiciously at Isaac. He took out a crumpled piece of paper – it was the note that she'd written to Alex, and then quickly hidden. "You...you searched me?!"

The silence became even more uncomfortable. Jenna was fuming. She breathed in and out noisily through her nose. She was in Vale...her mother's hometown, talking to people who had known her mother. It was so unexpected, so out of context, that she hardly dared believe it.

"I...I need to think..." Jenna's head was spinning. She quickly walked out of the door, and downstairs toward the front door.

"Wait!" came Isaac's voice, "you can't go out there!"

Too late. Jenna threw open the door. And gasped.

It was huge. Imil wasn't small, but Vale seemed to be three times the size. The house she was in sat at the top of the hill that Vale was draped across, giving her a view of almost the entire city. Luscious, green grass stretched across the city like a giant carpet, and the calming sounds of trickling water from the numerous fountains and natural waterfalls made it seem so peaceful. It was also very pleasantly warm – Imil's climate was harsh and cold, and the change was welcome to her.

Isaac stood at her shoulder as she marvelled at it all. "Pretty, isn't it? Welcome to Vale. I should warn you, though, not that many people know you're here. We had to keep it under wraps, otherwise someone might have told Imil, and then goodness knows what would have happened. So just...stay out of sight, all right?"

Jenna barely managed a nod. She wandered from the safety of the house, and headed up the hill to get a better view of the city. A large tree provided some shade, and she sat down and gazed upon the whole of Vale.

It was so much to take in. She was in her mother's city. Her mother had been so happy here, so carefree, before her father had come along and ruined her entire life. Jenna could actually picture a younger version of her mother, of Mehry, running around through the shallow streams and along grassy meadows, perhaps visiting the bakers or blacksmith; long hair blowing in the gentle wind.

Her mother... I have distant relatives in other parts of the world...how would you like to meet them? They had almost made it. Almost. They had been so close...looking across the city her mother had loved so much, knowing she could never return, Jenna couldn't stop the tears flowing.

Thank you, and goodnight!

Chapter 4: The Truth Will Out

I'm SUCH a procrastinator. Been meaning to update this for months, and every time I've sat down to write, something else has distracted me. But here I am. Ehe.

Disclaimer: I don't own Golden Sun! If I did, money would not be an issue!

Several hours had passed, and still she lay in the dying sun. Her throat was parched, and her eyes were stinging, but her mind was reeling so much that she hardly paid attention to her physical pain. Jenna lay in the grass, staring at the sky, as watching the city only seemed to fuel her extreme emotions. She'd long since stopped crying, but her emotions were delicate.

Jenna acknowledged the human-shaped shadow that passed over her, but dismissed it numbly. The grass next to her seemed to shuffle, before settling and emitting a sigh. Jenna closed her eyes, not wanting to engage in conversation. She knew exactly who it was – he hadn't stopped tailing her since her kidnap. He seemed to understand her wish for silence, and for a few moments, they lay side by side in the soft grass.

Suddenly the silence seemed too much for her. Clearing her throat, she could hear his attention shift; he was listening intently. Truthfully, she didn't know what to say – her mind was a jumble, and all she wanted to do was fill the gaping silence.

"The river," she commented. She heard him turn his head to look at her. "Some sort of poisonous weed floats around in

it." Her voice was flat and emotionless. "It snagged my mother once."

She could feel his bewilderment as to where she was going with the story. Jenna didn't know why she was talking to her kidnapper about her mother. Stockholm syndrome, perhaps? Whatever it was, he was intrigued. "Hmm?"

"She had to hop around on one foot for days. Her ankle was four times its usual size. Her mother lost her voice from yelling."

He allowed a small chuckle to escape from him. The positive sound woke her from her stupor, and she finally turned her head to face him. "You're telling the truth, aren't you?" she asked, already knowing the answer. Slowly, seriously, he nodded his head.

Jenna let out a large sigh, releasing a lot of the pent-up emotion, and turned her head once more to look at the sky. "I don't know what I expected," she muttered. "My mother talked about Vale so many times, but now I'm here I can't seem to accept it."

"Well, it's real," said Isaac, who was feeling a little useless and didn't quite know what to say. He was slightly relieved that she was opening up to him instead of screaming at the top of her voice, but he had a suspicious feeling that it was the emotions talking, and the real Jenna would never reveal such personal feelings. "It's all here, including the poisonous weed." He smiled slightly, and leaned over. "Don't ever tell him I told you, but Felix got stung by the same weed. He couldn't walk for days. We had endless fun stealing his clothes – he couldn't catch us to get them back."

So the dark one is called Felix, Jenna registered that in her disorganised mind. She allowed herself a mental picture of

the tall, angry man chasing a light-hearted Isaac, and smiled slightly.

"Aha!" Isaac clapped triumphantly and sat up, grinning and pointing at her. "So your face *does* have the ability to create a smile!"

"Well, picturing that brute in a compromising position is enough to make me laugh out loud," Jenna commented, remembering Felix's vile temper and rough handling.

Isaac smirked. "Not a fan of Felix, then? He's a softie, really. He just didn't really like the idea of coming with me when we went to Imil."

"He didn't?" Jenna felt her intrigue rise, and she sat up to meet his eyes. "Why was that?"

"Oh, Felix had his reasons," Isaac shrugged lightly, but failed to meet Jenna's eyes. "I don't think he was amazingly interested in Imil's affairs, and the idea of a long journey didn't appeal to him." He shrugged again. "'Course, my mum persuaded him to come with me."

Jenna managed another smile at the thought of Felix cowering under Isaac's mother's hard gaze. Having experienced her temper first hand, Jenna could even manage the slightest bit of sympathy for Felix. She couldn't help noticing that the question had made Isaac slightly uncomfortable. Sensing her doubts, Isaac changed the subject.

"So, now you've learned we're not cold-blooded abductors, is there anything you want to know? About the city, or you could ask my mum about her Highness."

Isaac stood, and held out a hand to help her up. Jenna refused the help, but she stood and followed him back to his house, where his mother was cooking something that smelled unlike anything Jenna had ever had before. She inhaled the aroma, and was hit with a strange sense of déjà vu.

"My mother," Jenna suddenly said, "you address her so formally. But she hailed from Vale, and was only royalty in Imil. This was her home. What changed?"

Isaac's mother halted her actions, and turned to face the young princess. "Rules," she stated simply, her eyes angry. Jenna frowned.

"My mother...?"

"Oh, no," Isaac's mother laughed fondly. "Your mother was quick to inform us that we should treat her as we always had done. She hated the formalities that came with her title, especially in her homeland. It was when *he* discovered who she, and you, was that the King enforced a rule that all royalty should be respected and addressed as formally as we do now." Her face darkened, and she stirred the contents of a pan so vigorously that she spilled some over the top. Cursing, she turned her full attention back to her cooking.

Jenna couldn't suppress a smile. Isaac's mother seemed to remember her own with a similar fondness. "You knew my mother well, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes," Isaac's mother's voice grew warm again. "We were quite the pair. We used to sneak up to the temple in the dead of night, and get a good telling off the next morning." She chuckled and shook her head. "I often wonder what would have been different had she stayed in Vale."

Jenna was silent. She knew her mother was at her happiest in Vale, but had she not left for Imil, Jenna would never have been born. She chewed her lip and forced the topic onto something else. "I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name, Mrs...?"

"Dora, just call me Dora," the woman said cheerily, stirring the same pan.

Her head was still a muddle of emotions later on after a hearty (and still oddly familiar) meal. Jenna played absent-mindedly with the corner of an old cloth placed on the table, staring into the distance. Since she'd arrived, she'd heard nothing but good about her mother, and the stories seemed to tally with her own mother's memories. She sighed heavily – she honestly didn't know where to place an opinion.

"Supposing I did believe you, and I'm still not saying that I do," Jenna began, not looking at Isaac who appeared to be staring at her intently, "what would be your next move?"

Isaac considered an answer with a furrowed brow and slightly tilted head. Finally, he said, "Well, the priority is to keep you safe. After that... well, we're not sure. I think some think we should send someone to Imil to try and negotiate, but others think it's too dangerous."

"And after that? Should the negotiations go to plan..." Jenna found her throat was constricting, "would I have to go back?"

Isaac heard the change in her voice, and heard the subtle fear she was trying to hide. He shrugged, trying to lighten the mood. "Not if you didn't want to. It would be completely up to you, though I'll bet Imil would need its rightful ruler back."

Jenna scoffed. "They probably believe I am dead. My father would have had to come up with a good enough reason as to why my mother and I suddenly stopped appearing in public."

An uncomfortable silence descended between the two. Jenna sighed. "I don't want to go back there," she said softly. "My father will no accept me for who I am, and I refuse to help him rule over a city which has been mislead."

"Wouldn't the people deserve the truth?" Isaac pointed out. "If you didn't go back, then they'd always believe that you died, and always believe that pure Mercury blood is better than all others."

He had a point, but it didn't help matters. She did *not* want to return to a caged life. If she even kept her life. Her father would be so angry that he would most likely have her executed, and she definitely didn't want *that*.

"Where would you go?" he continued. "You don't have anywhere else to stay. Does that mean you would stay here, in Vale?"

She could hear the slight hope in his voice, and wondered why he cared so much. He'd obviously cared enough to go and rescue her from Imil, and cared enough to talk stonehearted Felix round to the idea. Jenna made a non-committal noise and shrugged lightly. "Perhaps," was all she said, truly having no idea. Vale was lovely, and her mother had spoken of it with such love, but could she bear to be so happy in her mother's hometown when her mother couldn't enjoy the same happiness?

"I'm going for a walk," she stated, standing up and wondering whether fresh air would help to soothe her headache.

"Again?" Isaac chuckled. "You sure do like your exercise, Princess. Want me to come with you?"

"No." She caught the hurt look he gave off, but she could tell whether he was joking or not. "No, thank you, I will be fine on my own."

"Whatever you say," he shrugged. "Your room'll be ready when you get back."

She nodded and headed out of the front door, feeling Isaac's eyes on her as she walked out. Was he truly concerned about her? Or had everything he told her a lie to make her stay? Did Vale have a grudge against Imil and kidnap her to get back at her father?

"But a whole town wouldn't do something on this scale," she said to herself.

Jenna found her familiar spot by the tree, and lay in the cool grass, watching the stars blink back down at her. She couldn't gather her thoughts together in a logical sequence, and the more she tried, the more painful her head seemed to grow. Finally, she gave up in a huff of impatience, and closed her eyes, breathing deeply.

"You should be inside." A coldly familiar voice interrupted her thoughts, and Jenna snapped her eyes open to see Felix towering over her, looking at her disapprovingly. Rising to the challenge, Jenna stood and tried her best to meet his eye level. He was certainly tall – she was naturally tall for her age – and his dark features only made him seem more intimidating.

"Why?" she asked, glaring at him. "Afraid I'll get used to freedom? Worried I'm homesick and longing to be locked up again?"

"This is *our* city, not yours, and you don't have the right to go roaming it as if you own the place."

"At least I don't strut around like a huge, menacing shadow. Got something to hide, or do you scare people for a hobby?" Jenna retorted, feeling her blood set alight.

Felix tried a different tack, feeling his own blood start to boil. "You ungrateful bitch. Vale rescues you from a non-existent life and gives you food and shelter here, and all you can do is complain."

"How *dare* you address me like that!" Jenna's voice doubled in volume, sending a dog in a nearby house into a barking frenzy. "And I will remind *you* that not only does this city have a strong link with Imil, my mother used to live here. She called this place her home, and so if I decide I wish to explore it then that is *my* decision and mine alone!"

"Your whore of a mother can't have loved it too much here if she rang off with the king from a foreign land," Felix spat, feeling horrendously angry.

Jenna reeled. How *dare* he speak of her mother like that. "You *bastard*," she seethed, taking an unconscious step toward him. "You never knew my mother. You never met my father, and you never knew the measures he took to seduce her, so don't you *dare*-"

"Don't I dare what? Tell the truth? Did you hold your mother in such reverence that she couldn't *possibly* do any wrong?" Felix's tone grew mocking, yet remained stony. "She never told you what she left behind when she ran off with that noble prat, did she?"

"She left a life she had grown tired of and made a future. She made history, and she made herself happy, and it was

all down to her. My father did *nothing* to help her, and she still built a life where finance was nothing to worry about, so she could concentrate on the people who mattered to her most!"

Felix shook his head, and his eyes grew darker than his normal chocolate brown colour. Jenna felt her heart contract – she'd never known how her mother had truly lived apart from the glowing stories she'd been told. Her mother hadn't been hiding something, had she?

"No," he said dangerously. "No. Your mother *never* had others' lives at heart. If she had, she would not have done what she did. She would not have abandoned the one person who needed her more than anything."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Jenna spat, suddenly feeling afraid.

Felix was eerily calm, but Jenna could feel a radiating anger coming from him.

"I am talking about her son."

Oh dear. What's Felix talking about? Find out in the next instalment!